ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

www.marp.org marprail@yahoo.com

Issue # 74 **November 2017**

The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.

Monthly meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. The public is invited to attend.

MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2016-2018

Steve Vagnozzi	*Chair*
Open	*Vice-Chair*
Stewart Bolinger	*Treasurer*
Elizabeth Green	*Secretary*
John Langdon	*Gov'l/Public Affairs Coordinator*
Robert Tischbein	*Membership Coordinator*
Kay Chase	*Communications Coordinator*
Adam Tauno Williams	*Meetings Coordinator*
Robert Patterson	*Detroit/Metro Region Chair*
Mark Miller	*Northern Region Chair*
Open	*West Region Chair*
Open	*East/Central Region Chair*

The Michigan Passenger Editor and Webmaster, Larry Sobczak

ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase

2017 MEETINGS

14 January – REO Town Depot (former Grand Trunk Depot), Lansing

18 February – 1st Methodist Church, Kalamazoo

18 March – Clinton Northern Railway Museum, St. Johns

22 April – Grand Trunk Pub, Detroit

13 May – Chicago Union Station

10 June – Executive Committee

15 July – Traverse City

19 August – Bangor

23 September –Durand Union Station

21 October – Grand Rapids

November – no member meeting

2 December – MARP 44th Annual Meeting, Dearborn

Visit www.marp.org
Email marprail@yahoo.com

There's a Light at the End of the Tunnel

And it May Even Be a Train!

Following months of rumors and speculation, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) announced on November 8 that the new railcars destined for the Midwest and California will be built by Siemens at its plant in Sacramento CA. The new contract calls for 137 single-level cars, with 49 going to Caltrans and 88 to the Illinois Department of Transportation under a multi-state agreement that will deploy the new cars on state-supported routes in Illinois, Michigan and Missouri.

Siemens' Sacramento manufacturing hub has been in existence for more than 30 years, most recently producing the 33 SC-44 Charger locomotives that will be used on the *Wolverine*, *Blue Water* and *Pere Marquette* routes in Michigan, the *Carl Sandburg*, *Saluki/Illini* and *Lincoln* services in Illinois, the *Hiawatha* in Wisconsin and the *Missouri River Runner* in Missouri.

Siemens has also built the trainsets for Florida's high speed *Brightline* trains. It is widely thought that the Midwest's new cars will be similar in design to those built for the **Brightline**.

According to the **Caltrans press release**, the new cars will have spacious interiors focused on passenger comfort and will be equipped with Wi-Fi, convenient power outlets, large windows, bike racks, work tables, state-of-the art restrooms with touchless controls and full ADA accessibility throughout. The sealed passageway between cars eliminates the hazardous vestibule, which is slippery during rain and snow. The cars are to be delivered in 24 to 34 months after production begins next year.

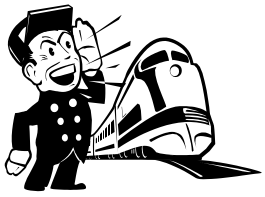
Trains Newswire on 9 November reported that the California funding appears secure, but a question remains about the funding for the Midwest equipment which flowed through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 with a spending deadline of 30 September 2017. *Newswire* had not reached the Midwest states for confirmation of their funding.

The original 2012 order for 130 bi-level rail cars was with Nippon-Sharyo, which built a new plant in Rochelle IL and expected to employ nearly 100 workers. Production was put in limbo when the prototype failed a crash test in September of 2015.

MARP WILL NOT MEET IN NOVEMBER

We wish you all a
HAPPY THANKSGIVING
with family and friends

See details on next page for MARP's 44th Annual Meeting scheduled for Saturday, December 2 in Dearborn.



MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

44th ANNUAL MEETING

O'Kelly Banquet Hall, 23663 Park St, Dearborn MI 48124

2 December 2017 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Map & Directions

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Rick Harnish

"A Bright Future for Passenger Trains in the Midwest"

Make plans now to attend! This will be a joint meeting with the Midwest High Speed Rail Association, whose executive director, Rick Harnish, will speak about exciting developments to create a strengthened and expanded passenger train network throughout the Midwest over the next four decades.

MARP will honor John DeLora for his dedicated work over many years to improve Michigan train services and conditions for passengers. John founded MARP in 1973 and served as Chair for many years. He is also a 48 year member of the National Association of Railroad Passengers and served 15 years as Vice-President before his retirement in January this year.

The cost to attend is $25 per person and includes a catered luncheon. The registration deadline is November 24.

ONLINE REGISTRATION is available at marp.org/?p=6693 using Pay Pal, a major credit card or debit card

If you prefer, you may download a form here and mail it to arrive before the deadline of November 24.

ACT NOW! The deadline for registration is November 24

Amtrak adds trains for Thanksgiving, ridership rebounds after construction

MDOT, November 8, 2017 -- In anticipation of the busiest travel week of the year, Amtrak will accommodate the surge of holiday travelers with **extra trains** in Michigan. Tickets sell out quickly, so customers are encouraged to plan ahead and **book tickets** early.

Michigan Special Thanksgiving Timetable

Amtrak and MDOT offer these travel tips:

- Avoid the rush, arrive early. The busiest travel days are the Tuesday, Wednesday and Sunday of Thanksgiving week. Customers are encouraged to arrive 45 minutes before departure, especially if picking up tickets.
- Trains feature free Wi-Fi, outlets at every seat, ample leg room and no middle seat.
- For only $25, cats and small dogs (20 pounds or less) are welcome for trips up to seven hours on most routes.
- Check holiday train schedules and status before arriving at the station on **Track Your Train**, or **Amtrak mobile apps**.

Ridership Rebounds

Overall ridership on Michigan's state-sponsored Amtrak trains increased in FY 2017 to 738,837, an 8% improvement over the previous year. This increase in ridership is attributed to reduced delays as well as a full schedule of trains operating on the Chicago-to-Detroit/Pontiac *Wolverine* corridor. During the summer of 2016, track and signal construction between Kalamazoo and Dearborn resulted in reduced schedules and delays. This year, trains are operating faster and smoother, and *Wolverine* ridership has increased 12% over the previous year, with sales of $20.4 million.

"We are excited to see construction activity wrap up on the corridor and customers are returning to the trains this year," said Tim Hoeffner, MDOT Office of Rail director. "Amtrak trains continue to provide a convenient and comfortable form of transportation for people to travel in and out of Michigan."

The Chicago-to-Holland/Grand Rapids *Pere Marquette* service saw a 4% ridership increase, with sales of $3.2 million.

The Chicago-to-East Lansing/Port Huron *Blue Water* service saw a ridership increase of 2%, with sales of $6.5 million.

Photo by Steve Sobel

Ann Arbor Station Gets a Fresh Look

By Steve Sobel

The Ann Arbor train and bus station is a stop we make often, especially when attending concerts at the U of M School of Music at Hill Auditorium. In late October, I dropped in to see how things were going. While there, the ticket agent shared with me that Amtrak officials were due to visit on November 7 to check on several maintenance projects underway.

I made two trips. On Friday, November 3rd, I arrived in the early afternoon to find local contractors busy with projects to spruce up the place: replacing all ceiling tiles and installing some new lighting fixtures in the waiting room; making some miscellaneous electrical improvements; installing new weather carpeting between the two entrance doors; replacing bulbs and cleaning fixtures on the outside overhang; painting the outside wooden benches with a nice gray color; adding fresh mulch to the planter boxes; power washing the platform area; cleaning the windows and the interior floors; and adding a large new shelf in the storeroom to handle additional freight and baggage.

I took a chance and drove out on November 7th, not knowing when Amtrak management would be on site. No sooner had I arrived than I met Mr. James Ratliff, District Station Manager-East. He was in town to make certain all work was done on time and to his satisfaction. Except for the floor being cleaned and mopped, all of the improvements had been completed.

Mr. Ratliff couldn't tell me when other needed improvements will be forthcoming. "It all depends when we can get some additional monies," he said. At least two more items would be welcome: automatic entrance doors and replacement of a lot of the waiting room seats as many of them are not in good condition. It also would help if the Formica that's in so-so condition at the ticket windows could be replaced. I was told that the wiring inside the ticket booth would be upgraded.

Although deliberations about a "new" station continue, it will be at least five years before this takes place. For now, Amtrak has decided to invest in some needed improvements.

I am impressed with the station's new look! The new ceiling tiles and lighting fixtures give the room a much more cheery atmosphere. If you haven't been to the station in a while, may I suggest a visit soon? You will not be disappointed.

Editor's note: The Ann Arbor Amtrak Station also serves Greyhound. The Ride's Bus #21 connects to local transit with 30-minutes headways 7am-11pm on weekdays and hourly service 9am-7pm on weekends. MARP members Jeanie and Chuck Merckel and Clark Charnetski keep the station supplied with MARP newspapers and other passenger information.

Michigan Flyer's "Detroit Connector" Now Welcomes the General Public

The Detroit Connector, a University of Michigan bus service connecting the Ann Arbor campus to the city of Detroit, now provides service seven days a week to U-M faculty, staff, students and—for the first time—the general public. Stops include Central Campus Transit Center (CCTC) in Ann Arbor, UM-Dearborn, and UM Detroit Center. Extended hours Friday & Saturday. Schedule available online at **detroitconnector.umich.edu/schedule**

Hate Going West to Go East?

A new Amtrak Thruway service now allows, for example, a Port Huron traveler the opportunity to board a bus at 5:25 pm and arrive in Cleveland on the *Capitol Ltd*. a little more than eight hours later. Or maybe that traveler would LIKE to go east—to Jackson MI, perhaps. An 11:25 am Thruway bus connects, with a 5 hour wait, to the *Wolverine* at Detroit for a 7:59 pm arrival in Jackson. The return trip takes less time, leaving Jackson at lunchtime to connect in Detroit with a Thruway bus arriving in Port Huron at 5:00 pm. Visit **amtrak.com** to explore the many new options.

On the day before Thanksgiving in 2011, 4,752 Michiganders rode Michigan trains "over the river and through the woods . . ." It would have taken

thirty-two 149-passenger Boeing 737s to carry these people — and those planes weren't flying to most of the places those people wanted to go!

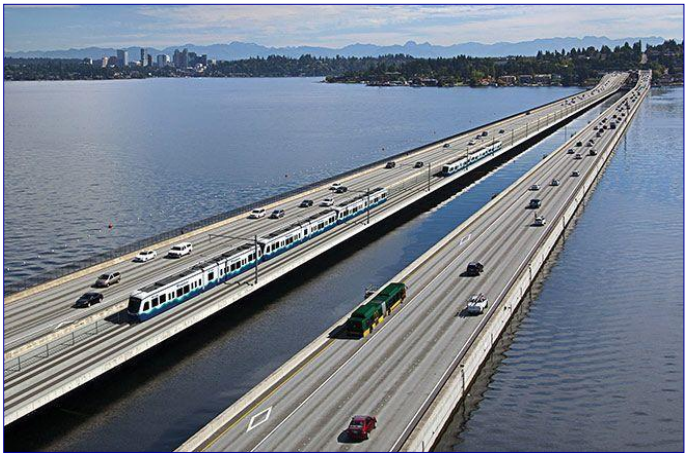
View from elsewhere . . .

"This fight has gone on long enough. For decades, rail passengers have been left waiting for freight trains to clear the rails. Even acts of Congress haven't been able to budge them out of the way. We need the courts to now recognize and allow Congress' goal to be carried out. The law creating Amtrak in the early 1970s codified a deal these railroads made with the American taxpayer: we'll relieve you of your common-carrier responsibility for passenger service, and in exchange you'll ensure those passenger trains get where they need to go on time. It has been a battle ever since."

—Jim Mathews, NARP CEO, commenting on **recent filing** in the case "National Association of Railroad Passengers et al versus Union Pacific Railroad et al" related to standards for on-time performance. Read the petition **here**.

"Our experience in developing the Michigan Flyer airport shuttle service should prove valuable for the Detroit Connector. One key to building ridership is frequency of service."

—Chad Cushman, president of Indian Trails, commenting on increased frequency and expanded hours for the **Michigan Flyer/Detroit Connector** which connects UM campuses in Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Detroit.



Train Tracks That Float

Not the least of the engineering challenges in building the new *East Link* light rail line connecting downtown Seattle and Bellevue is crossing the I-90 floating bridge. Described as a ***"brilliant solution"*** to keep the tracks in line, a series of steel platforms and flexible bearings will mitigate effects of roll, pitch and yaw where lake levels change up to two feet in a year and wind and traffic create slight twisting. Read more about the project **here**. People familiar with the Seattle area will enjoy **part 1** and **part 2** of a virtual ride on the new line when it opens in 2023.

Visit "Discover Pure Michigan"
On the Amtrak Website
click here

Save 20% on Travel Across Michigan
BOOK WITH SAVER FARES

MARP, INC
PO BOX 1368
Okemos, MI 48805-1368

Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard
202-224-3121

Sen. Debbie Stabenow

Sen. Gary Peters

Find Your Congressperson

Find Your State Senator

Find Your State Representative